

SAME LAND – DIFFERENT HISTORIES

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand and examine conflicting historical perspectives and claims about the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- Students will identify and discuss bias in history texts.

VOCABULARY & CONCEPTS

British	Israel	Plain of Sharon	Suez Canal
Canaanite Arabs	Jerusalem	Roman rule	Theodor Herzl
Caliph Umar Bin al-Khattab	Ottomans	Saladin	Zionism
crusaders	Palestine		

MEDIUM

Handout with excerpts from two history textbooks and an encyclopedia article



MATERIALS NEEDED

- Student Handout (pg. 5-6) with key vocabulary
- *Student Worksheet* (pg. 7-8) with text excerpts and questions for analyzing and comparing histories - 1 per student
- *Teacher Answer Sheet* (pg. 9-10) for decoding text excerpts

TIME

30 minutes

LESSON STEPS

1. Present *Introduction to the Lesson* (pg. 2) to the class.
2. Distribute *Student Handout* with key vocabulary.
3. Ask students to work individually or in groups to answer *Student Worksheet* questions about three text excerpts on the history of Israel/Palestine.
4. Lead students through decoding of text excerpts using *Teacher Answer Sheet*.
5. Lead a discussion about bias in textbooks using *Additional Information* (pg. 3).

INTRODUCTION THE TO LESSON

Do you remember studying for a history test in elementary school? Did you ever consider that the history you were reading might not have been the whole truth about the subject, but rather the partial perspective of the book's writer and editor? School textbooks are like any other source of information: they are constructed by individuals who focus on certain aspects of the subject matter and leave other things out based on how much space is available, what they consider most important and other factors.

In this lesson, you will consider three passages about the history of Israel/Palestine from three different sources. Each one of these passages focuses on a different time period as well. The sources are a fourth grade history text titled National Education, used by the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian Authority (CMIP "Jews, Israel and Peace"); an excerpt from a U.S.-based online encyclopedia entry for "Arab-Israeli Conflict" (MSN Encarta); and an Israeli religious text titled On the High Places of the Land (CMIP "Arabs, Palestinians, Islam"). You are to choose which passage came from which source by considering the following things: What information is included and what is left out? How are different groups referenced, especially Israelis and Palestinians, Arabs and Jews? Might this come from a religious or a secular source? Does the information seem biased toward a particular perspective? For each choice you make, give evidence to support your decision.

- **Distribute and/or review** the key vocabulary *Student Handout*.
- **Decide** whether you prefer for this to be an individual or small-group activity.
- **Distribute** *Student Worksheet* with text excerpts and questions. Give students time to reflect on their choices and evidence.
- **Review** the *Teacher Answer Sheet* in preparation for leading the decoding of the documents.
- **Lead** the decoding using the *Teacher Answer Sheet*.
- **Use** *Further Questions* and *Additional Information* to discuss bias in textbooks.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

When doing research, how can you find a more balanced view than that offered by a single source? How can you locate sources from varied perspectives?

Do you know how textbooks are selected for your school or place of worship?

Consider what you have learned in this lesson about language usage when looking at current newspaper or magazine reports. What do the terms they use suggest about the perspective to the news source? What about your textbooks? How can you assess their perspectives and points of view the same way you did with the passages in this lesson?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The issue of textbook bias in the Middle East became a major international issue with the publication of a report by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP). CMIP defines its purpose as “to encourage a climate of tolerance and mutual respect between peoples and nations, founded on the rejection of violence and the changing of negative stereotypes, as a means to resolving conflicts. CMIP's main work consists of examining the content of school textbooks used in the Middle East, to determine whether children are being taught to accept and recognize the right of the other to exist” (<http://www.edume.org/about/about1.htm>).

Their report - “Jews, Israel, and Peace in the Palestinian Authority Textbooks: The New Textbooks for Grades 4 and 9” - criticized the new National Education textbooks created by the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Education, which had assumed control over education in Gaza and the West Bank. The report criticized the textbooks for being anti-Western, for containing anti-Semitic portrayals of Jews and for tying present-day conflict to ancient disputes. It noted that those who give their lives for their country or religion are praised, which might be understood to suggest support for suicide bombers. Not all of the report was negative, however. The report also noted that the new textbooks were improvements over the Jordanian and Egyptian texts that had been used in the past. It said that the new texts were less hostile to Israel, less likely to incite violence and more supportive of values such as democracy and freedom.

The Palestinian Authority, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and the European Commission were all critical of the report, claiming that it was a biased review based on Israel's reaction to the second Intifada. Some also pointed out that the texts that were the focus of most of the criticism were actually the old Jordanian and Egyptian texts, not the new Palestinian-authored ones. Critics of the report argued that the authors knew that the new texts written by the Palestinian Authority were actually much better in their efforts to deal with these issues.

There were also critics who identified biases in Israeli textbooks. Israeli Dr. Ruth Firer partnered with Palestinian researcher Dr. Sami Adwan to research the textbooks used in their respective schools. “We say we have the right to the land and they don't,” Firer says. “Both sides claim ancient roots here. When we say we came from Abraham they go back even further and say they came from the Jebusites. They exclude Hebrew place names and we exclude Arabic names. We are both ignoring each other” (qtd. in FairfaxDigital “Mirror Image Textbooks Reflect Bias”).

Dr. Firer specifically criticized Israeli textbooks for ignoring or excusing the fact that atrocities were committed by the Zionist founders of Israel, as well as against them. In Firer's research on Israeli textbooks, she found that Israel is identified as a peace-seeking state trying to defend itself while Arabs are portrayed as war-seeking terrorists. She says Zionism is portrayed in Israeli texts as the only possible solution for Jews, and that Jews are the only ones to have a God-given right to occupy Palestine (FairfaxDigital “Mirror Image Textbooks Reflect Bias”).

REFERENCES

Appiah, Kwame Anthony and Henry Louis Gates, The Dictionary of Global Culture, New York: Knopf, 1997.

Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace. <<http://www.edume.org/about/about1.htm>>

---. "Arabs, Palestinians, Islam and Peace in Israeli School Textbooks. Update for 2000-2001 and 2001-2002. <<http://www.edume.org/> > Path: Reports. Israel; Update for 2000-2001 and 2001-2002.

---. "Images of Arabs." CMIP Reports. <<http://www.edume.org/reports/8/14.htm>>

---. "Jews, Israel and Peace in the Palestinian Authority Textbooks: The New Textbooks for Grades 4 and 9. 2004. <<http://www.edume.org/> > Path: Reports. Palestinian Authority; Oct. 2004.

Diller, Daniel, C., ed. The Middle East. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly , 2004.

Esposito, John L., ed. The Oxford Dictionary of Islam. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

FairfaxDigital. "Mirror Image Textbooks Reflect Bias."
<<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/10/21/1098316785882.html>>

MSN Encarta. "Arab-Israeli Conflict." <http://encarta.msn.com/encylopedia761588322/Arab-Israeli_Conflict.html>

Romano, Amy. A Historical Atlas of Israel. New York: Rosen, 2004.

BRITISH

Britain took control of much of the Middle East after the fall of the Ottoman empire during World I, although its imperial interests in Egypt go back earlier. The British army took control of the Suez Canal in the 19th century, cutting in half its travel time to India. British influence waned in 1954, after collaborating with France and Israel to take control of the canal. Egyptian nationalist leader Nasser forced the Europeans and Israelis out, with help from the U.S. The U.S. replaced Britain and France as the dominant foreign power in the Middle East.

CALIPH UMAR BIN AL-KHATTA

The Caliphs were the immediate successors to the Prophet Muhammad in Islam. Umar Bin al-Khattab was the second Caliph, elected by Muslim followers of Muhammad. He was sometimes called the second founder of Islam since the theocratic foundations of Islam were consolidated during his ten-year reign (634-644). He was a great military commander, and took the title “Commander of the Faithful” (Esposito 326). His conquests pushed Islam into new lands in Persia, central Asia, western India and Egypt. “Under Umar, the Middle East was reunified into a single, great empire, which it had not been since the age of Alexander the Great” (Diller 174).

CANAANITE ARABS

An ancient tribe living within the area known as the Levant (modern-day Syria, Jordan and Israel) between 3000 BCE-400 BCE. The Canaanites developed the world’s first written alphabet, which became the parent script for Phoenician, and subsequently influenced both Latin and Greek. In the Hebrew Bible, it is written that Abraham’s grandson Joseph led the Israelites out of Canaan into Egypt. Moses later persuaded the Pharaoh to let the Israelites return to Canaan where they met intense resistance from native Canaanites.

CRUSADERS

Participants in the European military expeditions conducted between the 11th and 13th centuries. Their Christian leaders claimed that the Crusades were intended to defend the European faith from Muslim expansion. Others said that the Crusades were actually a Christian holy war designed to restore Christian rule in Palestine and to liberate Jerusalem. The Church said that Christians could demonstrate their devotion to God by fighting in the Crusades as a way to receive holy salvation. In truth, many of those who joined the Crusades were interested in adventure, trade and looting (Appiah 160). In 1099, 100,000 European troops seized Jerusalem, slaughtering every man, woman and child. Thereafter, Jerusalem was known as the “Crusader state” in the east (Romano 23).

JERUSALEM

A holy city for Jews, Muslims and Christians. For Jews, it is Yerushalayim, the City of Peace. For Muslims, it is Al Quds, the Sacred. The Old City of Jerusalem contains the Western Wall, the remnants of the ancient Jewish temple destroyed by the Romans; the Dome of the Rock, where Muhammad ascended to heaven; and many historic sites from the life of Jesus. The United Nations Partition Plan of 1947 called for Jerusalem to be governed under international control. The Israelis captured Jerusalem in the 1967 war, and most consider it their eternal capital. Most Palestinians look to Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

THEODOR HERZL

The Hungarian-born founder of modern Zionism. He authored the book *The Jewish State*, and visited with emperors, sultans, pope and kings in his effort to create a homeland in Palestine for the Jews.

OTTOMANS

An empire lasting from 1300-1918, founded by Osman, a Turkish Muslim (Appiah 496). The Ottomans entered Palestine in 1516, shortly before the reign of the greatest of the Ottoman sultans, Suleyman the Magnificent, whose victories extended the empire from Algeria to Austria. Suleyman (or Suleiman) revived the Palestinian economy and rebuilt Jerusalem's city walls. By World War I, the Ottoman Empire had become known as the "sick man of Europe," and was finally defeated to end their 600 year rule (Diller 177).

PALESTINE

The eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, home to Jewish and Arab peoples since 3500 BCE. By 100 BCE, Palestine had been conquered and ruled by Egyptians, Jews, Greeks, Seleucids and others. Jerusalem is a holy site to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. As such, it is considered by many to be the most important city in Palestine.

THE PLAIN OF SHARON

Area in the northwest of Israel located between the West Bank and the Mediterranean Sea. It was noted in the Bible for its rich forests and flowery beauty. Today, the area contains many Israeli settlements and citrus farms.

ROMAN RULE

The Romans invaded Canan (later known as Palestine) in 63 BCE and held control for 300 years. Palestine remained a separate province with its own kings, the best known of whom was King Herod (37-4 BCE). Jewish nationalists - known as the Zealots - staged terrorist attacks against Roman rule. To protect against future Jewish uprisings, the Romans systematically killed Jewish leaders and disrupted Jewish communities throughout Palestine, dispersing them in what is known as the Diaspora (Greek for "Dispersion") (Romano 16-18).

SALADIN (Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi)

The Muslim ruler who successfully led armies against the European invaders during the Third Crusade (1188-92). In gathering his forces, Saladin invoked the principle of jihad as an exertion against a visible enemy or Devil. His victories restored Jerusalem to Muslim rule, returning the holy sites of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque to Muslim use. Saladin was known and admired for his humane treatment of the Christian population of Jerusalem (Appiah 275). He negotiated a peace treaty with Richard I the Lion Hearted, King of England, allowing for safe passage of Christian pilgrims to the holy city (160). Saladin was born in Iraq, of Kurdish ancestry, in 1138. During his lifetime, he became a symbol of strength, unity and justice to many Arabs. Saladin died in Damascus in 1193, after uniting Muslims in common cause and regaining nearly all territories seized by the Crusaders (567).

SUEZ CANAL

The waterway that separates the Sinai Peninsula from the rest of Egypt. It was first dug by Pharaoh Senusret III in 2000 BCE, and reinitiated in the modern era by Napoleon. The Canal plays an essential role in Egypt's economy and was of strategic importance in the Six Day War of 1967.

ZIONISM

The Jewish nationalist movement arising from the Jewish claim to the land called Eretz Israel in ancient Palestine. This was the land from which Jews were exiled by the Romans in the first century. The first Zionist Congress was organized in Switzerland in 1897 by Theodor Herzl. Its platform declared, "Zionism strives to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law" (Appiah 714).

NAME _____

DATE _____

DIRECTIONS

Read each of the passages listed below and decide which source it came from among the choices listed. Give evidence for your selection (biased language, facts and opinions).

Passage 1

“The Canaanite Arabs were the most ancient people that dwelt in Palestine. Many peoples and invaders later ruled it and built many places, which have become in time ancient monuments that still exist to this day. The Romans ruled Palestine for a long time. One of their monuments is the (archeological) site of Sebastia Village near Nablus. Then the Muslims conquered the land in the reign of Caliph Umar Bin al-Khattab. With the conquest of Palestine by the Muslims it became Muslim and it still is... The Franks (i.e., the Crusaders) occupied it until it was liberated from them by the hero Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (Saladin). Then the Ottomans ruled it. Palestine is still under Israeli occupation.”

Which source do you think this passage is from?

- ☐ Encarta (online encyclopedia) entry for "Arab-Israeli Conflict"
- ☐ Israeli religious textbook, On The High Places of the Land
- ☐ Fourth grade textbook from the Ministry of Education for the Palestinian National Authority

Give your evidence for your choice:

Passage 2

“When the lands in the Sharon were in the hands of the Arabs, they were unsuccessful in growing very much on that hard and arid soil. The Arabs, therefore, agreed to sell their lands at a negligible price to the Jews who came to buy them. The Jews, enjoying Heavenly help, used fertilizer on the land and improved it. They learned methods of efficient irrigation for the land and turned it into fertile soil.”

Which source do you think this passage is from?

- ☐ Encarta (online encyclopedia) entry for "Arab-Israeli Conflict"
- ☐ Israeli religious textbook, On The High Places of the Land
- ☐ Fourth grade textbook from the Ministry of Education for the Palestinian National Authority

Give your evidence for your choice:

Passage 3

“Throughout recorded history Palestine, located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, was conquered many times by invaders. Among these were the Jewish people, who were subsequently expelled by the Romans in AD 135 but maintained the idea of regaining control of the area, which they considered home. In the 1890s Theodor Herzl, a Jewish journalist living in Austria, advocated reestablishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Herzl believed Zionism (the reuniting of Jewish people in Palestine) would match “a people without a land with a land without a people.

Palestine was already inhabited, however. The countryside was home to Arabs, most of them Muslims, while the larger towns contained both Arabs and Jews. Some of the Jews were long established there, while others were religious pilgrims from Europe who had come to live near the holy sites in Jerusalem and other cities. (Because the vast majority of Palestinians were Muslim Arabs, the term Palestinians now usually refers only to them, not to the Jews of Palestine. Most Palestinians are Muslims.) The land was ruled by the Ottoman Empire, but the Ottomans saw little of value in Palestine and neglected the area. Consequently, poverty, disease, and malnutrition were widespread. Nonetheless, the area served as a land corridor between Europe, Asia, and Africa and thus had strategic importance. It was also near the Suez Canal, which, when opened in Egypt in 1869, connected the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea. Palestine was therefore important to the British, who occupied Egypt in 1882 and depended on control of the canal for its fortunes.”

Which source do you think this passage is from?

- ☐ Encarta (online encyclopedia) entry for "Arab-Israeli Conflict"
- ☐ Israeli religious textbook, On The High Places of the Land
- ☐ Fourth grade textbook from the Ministry of Education for the Palestinian National Authority

Give your evidence for your choice:

Passage 1

“The Canaanite Arabs were the most ancient people that dwelt in Palestine. Many peoples and invaders later ruled it and built many places, which have become in time ancient monuments that still exist to this day. The Romans ruled Palestine for a long time. (One) of their monuments is the (archeological) site of Sebastia Village near Nablus. Then the Muslims conquered the land in the reign of Caliph Umar Bin al-Khattab. With the conquest of Palestine by the Muslims it became Muslim and it still is... The Franks (i.e., the Crusaders) occupied it until it was liberated from them by the hero Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (Saladin). Then the Ottomans ruled it. Palestine is still under Israeli occupation.”

Which source do you think this passage is from?

- ☐ Encarta (online encyclopedia) entry for "Arab-Israeli Conflict"
- ☐ Israeli religious textbook, On The High Places of the Land
- ☒ Fourth grade textbook from the Ministry of Education for the Palestinian National Authority

Give your evidence for your choice:

No reference at all to the Jews. Muslim leader Saladin is referenced as a “hero” who “liberated” Palestine from the Crusaders. Palestine is the common reference for the region discussed. Suggestion that Palestine “still is Muslim”, overlooking Israel’s place as a nation. Israel is only referenced as the current occupier of Palestine.

Passage 2

“When the lands in the Sharon were in the hands of the Arabs, they were unsuccessful in growing very much on that hard and arid soil. The Arabs, therefore, agreed to sell their lands at a negligible price to the Jews who came to buy them. The Jews, enjoying Heavenly help, used fertilizer on the land and improved it. They learned methods of efficient irrigation for the land and turned it into fertile soil.”

Which source do you think this passage is from?

- ☐ Encarta (online encyclopedia) entry for "Arab-Israeli Conflict"
- ☒ Israeli religious textbook, On The High Places of the Land
- ☐ Fourth grade textbook from the Ministry of Education for the Palestinian National Authority

Give your evidence for your choice:

Arabs are referenced as incapable of growing crops on the land that Jews made fertile, Jews enjoyed “Heavenly help.” The passage fails to mention that Jewish control of the land led to the displacement of Arab peasants.

Passage 3

“Throughout recorded history Palestine, located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, was conquered many times by invaders. Among these were the Jewish people, who were subsequently expelled by the Romans in AD 135 but maintained the idea of regaining control of the area, which they considered home. In the 1890s Theodor Herzl, a Jewish journalist living in Austria, advocated reestablishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Herzl believed Zionism (the reuniting of Jewish people in Palestine) would match “a people without a land with a land without a people.

Palestine was already inhabited, however. The countryside was home to Arabs, most of them Muslims, while the larger towns contained both Arabs and Jews. Some of the Jews were long established there, while others were religious pilgrims from Europe who had come to live near the holy sites in Jerusalem and other cities. (Because the vast majority of Palestinians were Muslim Arabs, the term Palestinians now usually refers only to them, not to the Jews of Palestine. Most Palestinians are Muslims.) The land was ruled by the Ottoman Empire, but the Ottomans saw little of value in Palestine and neglected the area. Consequently, poverty, disease, and malnutrition were widespread. Nonetheless, the area served as a land corridor between Europe, Asia, and Africa and thus had strategic importance. It was also near the Suez Canal, which, when opened in Egypt in 1869, connected the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea. Palestine was therefore important to the British, who occupied Egypt in 1882 and depended on control of the canal for its fortunes.”

Which source do you think this passage is from?

- ☒ Encarta (online encyclopedia) entry for "Arab-Israeli Conflict"
- ☐ Israeli religious textbook, On The High Places of the Land
- ☐ Fourth grade textbook from the Ministry of Education for the Palestinian National Authority

Give your evidence for your choice:

This excerpt presents a more balanced account than the other two. Although the passage focuses mainly on the Jewish experience in Palestine (as do many U.S. texts), it refers to Jews as "invaders" and acknowledges that "Palestine was already inhabited" when Herzl proposed Zionism. The broader geo-political focus on the "strategic importance," the Suez Canal, and the British reflects the more international perspective of the U.S.-based encyclopedia.